NEW
NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By Subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 383. Price, Five Cents.

KIDNAPPED IN BROAD DAYLIGHT

OR

NICK CARTER ON HIS OWN TRAIL

There was a flash and a sharp report, and the assassin pitched forward on the pavement, his leg shattered by a bullet from the weapon of the disguised Nick Carter.

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KIDNAPED IN BROAD DAYLIGHT;

OR,

Nick Carter on His Own Trail.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A MESSAGE FROM THE SECRET SERVICE CHIEF.

"Have I the honor of addressing M. Nicholas Carter?"

The detective did not raise his eyes from the time-tables he was examining when the soft tones, scarcely louder than a whisper, interrupted his solitude. The voice belonged to a man and it spoke to him from a proximity that could not have exceeded two yards, and yet, until the question fell upon his ear, the detective was unaware of the presence of another person than himself in his room.

Nevertheless, he did not disclose that fact by word or sign.

"It would seem that you have that honor," he replied, coolly, and without changing his attitude even by a movement of the eyelids. "Who are you, and what do you want?"

"I have come to you from the chief of the department of secret service of the Paris police," replied the man, in the same soft tones.

Still Nick neither raised his eyes nor altered his attitude.

"Did the chief of the department of secret service of the Paris police instruct you to enter my room unannounced?" he asked, coldly.

"No, sir. He——"

"Then why did you do so?"

"Because I believed it would please you if I came silently—in fact, because I wished personally to please you."

"Very well. Return to the chief of the department

of secret service of the Paris police and say to him that M. Nicholas Carter refused to receive you."

"But, sir——"

"If you utter two more words inside the walls of this room I will throw you out of the window," said Nick, coldly, but in a tone which was entirely devoid of ambiguity. And still, without raising his eyes to discover if the man obeyed his injunction to go, he continued his examination of the time-tables.

Presently, however, he dropped the last one upon the table in front of him and leaned back in his chair.

The room was empty save for his own occupancy, and yet, although he had listened for the departure of the man who had made his entrance so silently, he had not heard a sound.

The man had come and gone, had stood by the detective's side for several seconds, and yet not a sound save the soft tones of the stranger's voice and the rustling of the paper time-tables in the detective's hands, had disturbed the silence of the room.

"An Apache Indian couldn't have done that any better," mused Nick, smiling to himself. "What a soft and tender voice he had, too. Sounded like the voice of an Oriental. His English had a suggestion of Oriental accent in it, too, and yet—— Oh, well, there is no danger that he won't return. He'll never take that message to his chief. He'll take a walk around the street for a little while, and then he'll return and send up his card. Humph! One of my friend M. Berthier's best spies, I suppose, and the fellow thought he'd see me jump, or express some sign of astonishment, when he whispered in my ear in that way. Well, I fooled him. But, all the same, he's a dandy! I wouldn't have thought there was a man on earth who could steal into my presence without my knowledge—and I won't let him know that he did so, either."

A half hour passed, and then, as Nick had predicted, a card was brought to him. Two minutes later the owner of the card entered the room.

Nick did not rise from his chair when the stranger entered, but remained seated, with the card in his hand, and a decided frown upon his brows. Nor did he wait for his caller to address him, although that caller was, so far as appearances went, an aristocrat and a gentleman.

"You are Jean de Saranac?" he asked, curtly, ignoring the other names, as well as the titles that were engraved upon the card.

"Yes, monsieur," returned the caller, bowing, and showing his matchless white teeth in a deprecating smile.

"You were here half an hour ago?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Say, 'Sir,' since you speak English. I like it better. You came from the chief of the department of secret service of the Paris police; you introduced yourself into my room without being announced, believing that you could enter it without my knowledge; you did that without instructions from your superior officer, impelled to do so by your own conceit; I directed you to return to your superior, and inform him that I refused to receive you, and now you have returned here prepared to lie to me by pretending that you have done so, and that he bade you return. All this is true, is it not?"

"Quite true, sir."

"Well, sir, when people undertake to be funny with me, they are apt to get themselves into trouble. If I were to send you back to your chief with a message to the effect that I declined to receive his message through you——"

"Oh, sir; I beg, Mr. Carter, that you will not do that."

The man was quite humble now, and looked genuinely frightened.

"It would merely be serving you as you deserve, Saranac," continued Nick, as if the man had not spoken. In the United States, we would describe your conduct as 'too fresh,' and I do not like to have fresh people around me. Neither, I believe, does M. Berthier, your chief."

"I hope that you will consent to forgive me for my offense, Mr. Carter," said Saranac, with deep humility. "I know that I deserve your reproaches. I believed that I could introduce myself into your presence without your knowledge. I have a talent for that

sort of accomplishment, and I am over proud of it. I should have known better than to suppose that I could impose upon you, sir. Again, I beg your forgiveness."

"Oh, well, let us forget it. Sit down."

"Thank you, sir, very, very much."

"Forget it! Now, what is the message from Berthier?"

"He commissioned me to request that you would do him the honor to call upon him at three o'clock this afternoon, at his office."

"Saranac," said Nick, sharply; "he did not do anything of the kind. What he said to you was something like this: 'Carter is at the Hotel Imperiale. Ask him if he can come here at three this afternoon, and if he cannot come at that time, to make an appointment for an hour later.' Isn't that about what he said?"

"Yes, sir, almost his exact words."

"Very well. When he gives you a message, deliver it as he gives it. When you talk with me, come to the point. I have had occasion to teach you two lessons in the short time I have known you. If we are to be friends, you will have to be somewhat more direct in your methods with me. Now, are you to tell me what he wishes to see me about?"

"I have no such instructions, sir."

"Then return to Berthier, and say that I had decided to take the three o'clock train out of Paris. Since he wishes to see me, I will wait until four, but he must see me at two, or not at all. It is the best I can do."

"I will do so at once, sir, but——"

Nick threw back his head and laughed aloud.

"I wish you could see the expression of your own face just now, Saranac," he said. "You look as if you would like to say to me that Berthier's requests are commands, and that it would be impossible for me to leave Paris at all if Berthier chose to keep me here. Well, all that is quite true in a sense, but if I wished to leave Paris, Berthier wouldn't try to detain me. We are old friends. Now take my message. Tell him I'll be there at two."

"I will deliver it, sir, exactly as you have said it," replied Saranac.

"Good!" said Nick, laughing. "If you do, it will be the first time in your life that you ever did a thing exactly as you were told. But try, this time, and, if you succeed, I will think I have done you some good."

CHAPTER II.

THE CHARGE AGAINST THE DETECTIVE.

"Well, chief, here I am," said Nick, as he entered the office of the head of the secret service of Paris. "I am sorry that I could not make it at three, as you requested, but—— Well, unless you have something of great importance to detain me, I ought to catch that four o'clock train at the latest. I couldn't have done that if I had waited till three to see you."

"I changed the hour of an important engagement in order to meet you at two," replied the chief, "and I may as well tell you at once that I did it for your sake more than my own. I will, of course, be glad if you will remain in Paris a few days and give me your assistance, but that was not my reason for sending you the message."

"No! What was it, then?"

"Something has happened which I felt that you ought to know before you went away."

"Ah! Something that concerns me, eh?"

"Not exactly. You and the Countess de Tierney were friends, I believe?"

"Were friends? Certainly. Are friends? I hope so. What's up?"

"You lately returned from Russia together on a United States war ship, did you not?"

"Yes."

"Have you seen the countess since your return?"

"No."

"And that was three days ago, was it not?"

"Practically. To be correct, the morning of the day before yesterday, when I parted from her. What the devil are you driving at, Berthier?"

"Patience, my dear Carter. Where did you part with the countess?"

"At the railway station. I helped her into the carriage——"

"Her own carriage, was it?"

"Yes. At least she recognized it as her own. She had telegraphed from Havre of her expected arrival. When we got down from the train she walked directly to the carriage, addressed the coachman by name, entered and was driven away."

"And you have neither seen nor communicated with her since?"

"No."

"Well, Carter, you are the last person who is known to have seen her or spoken with her."

"What do you mean? That she has disappeared?"

"I mean that she has not been seen nor heard from since the moment you placed her in the carriage at the station and said good-by to her."

"When did you first know of this, chief?"

"An hour before I sent Saranac to tell you to come here."

"Who reported the disappearance?"

"The count. It seems that he had been visiting at a chateau in one of the provinces, and did not return to his home until to-day. He had supposed, of course, that the countess was at home, because the message sent to him by her from Havre had informed him that she would arrive as you have already stated. She had not been home, and not one of the servants has seen her since here reported return to the city. The count was in doubt if she had left Havre until I telegraphed there to find out."

"What has become of the coachman who drove her carriage?" asked Nick.

"He is on hand."

"Well, he saw her enter the carriage, and he drove away with her inside it."

"He says that he did not see her enter the carriage."

"What does he say?"

"That she was accompanied to the carriage by a gentleman; that she spoke to him—the coachman—and told him that she wished to be taken directly home; that presently he heard the carriage door bang shut, and that he drove away. When he arrived home, the countess was not in the carriage, and he is, therefore, certain that she did not enter it."

"Oh, he is, eh? Well, I happen to be certain that she did enter it. I put her inside the carriage, and closed the door myself, and I stood there until after the horses started."

"Then you are, of course, positive that she did not leave the carriage by the opposite door."

"Of course I am positive of that. That is rather an odd question for you to ask of me, Berthier."

"Don't misunderstand me. I merely wished to assure myself that you are sure of that point. You know, or, if you do not, it is time that you were told, the Countess de Tierney is a most eccentric young woman. She has been to Russia and back twice within a short time, and she did not think——"

"I know all about those trips, Berthier; I also know all about the countess—and the count, also, for that matter. We are, in fact, friends."

"Are you referring to the count, or to the countess?" asked the chief, dryly.

"To both," replied Nick, shortly.

"Have you seen the count since you have been in Paris this time?"

"No."

"Then, let me advise that you do not count too strongly upon his friendship, Carter."

"I will have to ask you to explain that insinuation, Berthier," said Nick, slowly; but the pupils of his eyes contracted to pin points, and his tones rang coldly on the ears of his companion. However, Berthier did not hesitate.

"It is not an insinuation, Carter," he said. "It is a statement of fact."

"Of what fact?"

"Of the fact that the count no longer feels friendly toward you—or toward his wife, either, for that matter. In short, he has no doubt that you know where she is at this moment."

"Ah! I begin to understand. May I ask, sir, if you share these opinions with the count?"

The chief shrugged his shoulders.

"I have no opinions regarding the matter. The

count has asked me to find his wife; I shall do my utmost to do so, and I would like to have your assistance—unless you feel that you must, indeed, leave Paris this afternoon."

"In which case you will consider it as a part of your duty to send one or more of your men with me, just to make sure that I haven't got the countess concealed in my traveling bag, eh?"

"Exactly."

"By jove, Berthier, but I admire your monumental cheek!"

"I could not hold this position if I were without it, Carter."

"I guess that's true, all right. Look here, I won't get angry, for the thing is too absurd to get into a temper about it, but I would like to know if you—yourself, I mean—really believe that I know where the countess is. Tell me; I won't get hot."

"She is a very beautiful woman, Carter."

"Humph! Yes. I honestly think she is the most beautiful woman I ever saw; but that does not answer my question."

"She has traveled from Paris to St. Petersburg on the same train with you twice."

"That's true, too; but that doesn't reply to my question, either."

"Well, if I had been situated as I think you have been, I do not hesitate to say that I should have lost my heart to Yvonne de Tierney."

"Good Lord! Would you, really? Well, you must remember that you are a Frenchman, and you carry your heart on your sleeve. I am an American, and I leave mine at home when I travel."

The chief shrugged his shoulders. Then he continued:

"And I have been told on exceedingly good authority, that the countess did lose her heart to you."

"Whose authority?"

"The count's."

"Where did he get it?"

"From his wife, doubtless, since he said it was she who told him."

"Bosh!"

Another shrug from the chief; and then he asked:

"Shall you leave Paris this afternoon?"

"No. I'll remain and see what can be done about this matter."

"I am glad of that, Carter."

"But you have not replied to my question yet, chief."

"What question?"

"I asked you if you believe that I know where the countess is at this moment."

"I will not say that I believed it; I did think that such an explanation might be possible."

"And now?"

"If I did not know you so well, I should certainly have you watched."

Nick laughed outright.

"Do you know, I find this rather amusing," he said. "In all my experience I think this is the first time that I was ever called up before a police officer and questioned as if I were a guilty party. It's interesting."

"You know, Carter," said the chief, softly, and rubbing his hands together meditatively, "this is a case in which you might be guilty, but still one in which I would hold you entirely blameless. In my opinion the Countess de Tierney is the most beautiful woman in the world."

"By heaven! Berthier, I believe now that you think I know where she is."

Berthier bowed his head but made no reply.

"Do you?" asked Nick.

"I would much rather believe that the countess had informed you of her whereabouts than to believe that you are either stupid, or a fool—or blind. I wish you would understand that I am your friend, Carter. The count has asked me to find his wife for him, but I have no idea where to look for her. You have done me a great many favors in the past, in assisting me in the matter of difficult cases."

"Go ahead, Berthier, for I haven't quite caught your meaning yet; at least, I am not sure that I have. Go on."

"Well, I was about to say this: If you should outline a general direction which you think she might have

taken in her flight, I could bend all my energies in that direction."

"Oh, I see. And, in the meantime, I could suggest to the countess that she fly in the opposite direction. Is that it?"

"That is it, precisely, only I did not put it quite so plainly."

"What an ass you are about some things, Berthier! Excuse me, but it is true. You are one of the shrewdest and keenest detectives in the world until a pretty face comes between you and your official eye, and then it's all up with business. You can't see an inch beyond the pretty face to save your life. It is simply out of your power to understand how any man could be thrown in the society of Yvonne de Tierney, as I have been, without losing his heart to her, as you express it. Well, I didn't lose mine."

The chief shrugged his shoulders again.

"Look here, chief," said Nick. "Get your horse-sense to working for a moment. Forget the beauty of the countess and remember only that she is a woman and a friend of mine who has mysteriously disappeared."

"Well, what then, Carter?"

"Doesn't it occur to you that this may not be a runaway case at all?"

"What then?"

"Kidnaping."

"I do not think so."

"Or even murder."

"The circumstances do not warrant such a hypothesis. Listen, Carter. I, too, know that you put the countess into her carriage—into her own carriage, and that her coachman drove away with her, for my agents were at the station and saw that much."

"It is a pity that they did not follow the carriage home," said Nick.

"It is a pity, but, nevertheless, they did not. The carriage started with the countess inside. The coachman says, and sticks to his story, that when he arrived at his destination the countess had disappeared, and that he did not see her after she spoke to him at the station. Now that coachman's story is too good to be true; and the count tells me that there are only two things in the world which he could not resist. One was his mistress, and the other is money. Either because she asked him to do so, or because he has been well paid, that driver stopped somewhere on the way home, and if he did not look back when the carriage door opened and closed, he certainly would not have seen her alight."

CHAPTER III.

NICK CARTER ON HIS OWN TRAIL.

"You mean by that, of course," said Nick, "that Yvonne de Tierney left the carriage of her own desire, and that the coachman knows when she left it, and where she left it."

"I mean that she could have left it in no other way."

"Well, I don't agree with you. Do you happen to have that coachman about you? Is he here at headquarters, I mean?"

"Certainly. He is downstairs, locked up."

"Send for him. I'd like to ask him a few questions."

"How about your train out of Paris?"

"I shall not leave Paris till I know the fate of the countess."

"Do you mean that?"

"Of course I mean it."

"You're a queer one, Carter. I never could understand you. But I'll have the man up."

Five minutes later the countess' coachman was brought into the room and left there. At a motion from the chief he stepped before the desk and stood facing Nick Carter.

"Do you remember me?" asked Nick.

"I do, monsieur."

"Where did you last see me?"

"At the station, in company with madam, the Countess de Tierney."

"You drove away from the station with the countess inside the carriage?"

"I believed then that madam was inside the carriage Now, I do not know."

"Did you stop anywhere while you were on the way home?"

"I did not?"

"Are you positive about this point?"

"I am absolutely positive."

"You must remember that by stopping, I do not necessarily mean that you drove against the curb and came to a regular stop. I mean, did you encounter any obstruction, or were your horses brought to a standstill at any time while you were on your way home at that time?"

The coachman's face brightened with recollection.

"Now that you remind me of it, the carriage was stopped by a procession that was crossing the street in front of us. I think we must have stood there at least ten minutes; but we——"

"Were you near the curb when you were stopped?"

"No. In the middle of the street."

"Were there other carriages around you?"

"There was a crush of carriages, drays and vehicles of all kinds around us—yes."

"You say you stood there at least ten minutes?"

"All of that, monsieur."

"Try to remember now, what sort of vehicle it was that stood at your right during that time."

"I remember perfectly well, for I talked with the driver while we sat there almost abreast of each other."

"Well?"

"It was a private coupé—a very handsome one."

"And would you know the driver if you should encounter him again?"

"Instantly. Yes, sir."

"What did you say to him and what did he say to you?"

"We merely passed ordinary greetings, and made remarks about the procession that was passing. I remember that I did most of the talking. He did not have much to say."

"H'm! Well, we must find that fellow, I think. Now, what about the vehicle on the left side of you."

"I don't think I remember much about that side, sir."

"Try."

"I remember that the horse was a very ordinary one. I could not tell whether it was drawing a fiacre, if it were a coupé, or, in fact, what sort of a vehicle it was. I do not believe I saw it at all."

"Didn't you look at the driver?"

"I remember turning my head in that direction once, but there was no driver on the box. I decided that he had taken advantage of the stop to get down and fix his harness or something. I did not look again."

"Then you did not see him at all?"

"No. I did not see him at all."

"Did you hear him?"

"I don't understand, sir."

"Did you hear him speak to his horse, or to any person? Did you hear a voice on that side of you while you were waiting for the procession to pass?"

"Not that I recall, sir."

"And that is all you know about the vehicle on the left side of you?"

"Yes, sir. That is all."

"Then let us return for a moment to the one on the right."

"Yes, sir."

"Did you see any person or hear any person speak, who might have been a passenger in the coupé on your right, while you were waiting there?"

"Yes; the gentleman inside called twice to his driver."

"Ah! What did he say?"

"I do not know what he said, sir."

"Not know what he said. Why?"

"He spoke in a foreign tongue which I did not understand, sir."

"What tongue was it?"

"I do not know."

"Russian?"

"No, sir. I understand a little Russian. I would have known what was said—or, at least, I would have recognized the tongue if it had been Russian."

"Your name is Henri, is it not?"

"Henri Boulger—yes, sir."

"How long have you served the Count de Tierney?"

"I served madam, the countess, before I served him,

sir. I came with madam from her old home, when she was married to the count."

"Then you knew her when she was Mlle. Skavanief?"

"I have known her from a child, sir. I knew her father, and served him. That is why I speak a little Russian. He was Russian."

"You are fond of your mistress, Henri?"

"I would give up my life in her service, sir."

"I believe you, Henri. Now, let us get back to the incidents of that day."

"Yes, sir."

"Are you convinced that you heard no sound that would indicate the opening or the closing of the door of your own carriage, during the time you were waiting for the procession to pass?"

"I am quite sure; but there may have been such a sound without my hearing it. There were many noises around us, there."

"Naturally. Were the horses also restless?"

"Quite so; yes, sir."

"As a matter of fact, people might have entered and left your carriage without your knowledge during that time, eh?"

"I hardly think that, sir."

"Why."

"I would have felt such a thing on the springs of the carriage."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Yes, sir; for this reason: It was a carriage that was built especially for an invalid, and never delivered. Madam, the countess, purchased it for her own private use, because the springs were weak, and the carriage was, therefore, unusually comfortable for riding. She usually went alone in that carriage. The springs were so tender that when I was on the box, I could tell instantly if madam, the countess, moved from one side of the vehicle to the other."

"Indeed!"

"It is true, sir."

"And that fact accounts for the belief you have expressed to M. Berthier, that your mistress did not enter the carriage at all, at the station."

"Pardon me, sir, I did not express such a belief."

"What!" cried the chief, interrupting.

"Your pardon, M. Berthier. You did not understand what I did say. It was this: That madam, the countess, must have left the carriage the moment she entered it. I know that she did put her weight on the step—I know that she did step inside, for I could feel that much from my place on the box; but I could not determine, afterward, whether she seated herself in the middle of the carriage or stepped out upon the ground again."

"Very good," said Nick. "Now, Henri, I want you to tell me, without fear or favor, exactly your opinion of what did happen that day."

"Do you mean that, sir?"

"Certainly I mean it."

"You wish me to say exactly what I think, here, before M. Berthier?"

"Yes; exactly what you think, and why you think it."

"Very well, sir. I will be glad to tell what I think, and why I think it. I think that madam, the countess, stepped out of the carriage again, the same moment that she stepped into it, and that you helped her into another carriage nearby while I was driving away without her."

Berthier chuckled audibly, but said nothing. Nick was as rigid as a statue, for here was a reply which he had in nowise expected. For an instant, his impulse was to seize the coachman and crash him like an egg shell for the stupid fool he was; but the next, he smiled, and, turning to Berthier, he said:

"For the first time in my life, chief, I know what it means to become a victim of circumstantial evidence. This bids fair to be a case of Nick Carter on his own trail, doesn't it?"

CHAPTER IV.

THE COUNTESS' CONFIDANT.

M. Berthier leaned back in his chair, stretched his feet far out under the desk, tucked a huge cigar in the corner of his mouth, and thrust his thumbs through the armholes of his waistcoat.

"Now, my dear friend, Carter," he said, with an ironical smile playing about the corners of his mouth, "I will ask you to be silent for a moment while I ask a few questions which you might possibly forget—or neglect."

"All right," replied Nick, grimly. "You've got the drop on me, as they say in the West. I have nothing to do but hold up my hands for the time being. But, chief, while this is all very funny—very funny, indeed, from the standpoint of a joke, I would respectfully advise you not to go too far with it. Please do not forget that the lady whose name is concerned in this affair is one whom I infinitely esteem and respect. Now, go ahead."

For a moment the chief was silent. Then he said, slowly:

"Carter, the only competent witness of this affair, openly charges you with being a party to the disappearance of his mistress. Under the circumstances I have a perfect right to order your arrest this moment, and pardon me if I add I think I would be quite justified in doing so. If you will put yourself in my place, I think you will agree with me in that opinion."

"Possibly—if I could put myself in your place."

The chief shrugged his shoulders and smiled, while he stroked his fierce mustachios in ill-concealed delight.

"Never mind the sarcasm, Carter. You are annoyed, and probably with good reason. I will say to you frankly, before we go any farther in this matter, that I honestly believe that you know where the Countess de Tierney is at this moment—or, at least, that you could find her with little or no delay, if you should attempt it. We might as well start even, you know."

"Yes, chief, it is better so. I like your frankness, anyway. Look out, though, that you do not get winded in the first quarter of the race."

"I'll look out for that. I have said that I think you know where the countess is hiding, but that belief does not necessarily convey the idea that you are guilty of more than mere complicity with her in her desire to avoid her husband. However, we will return to that aspect of the case after I have questioned Henri."

He turned sharply to the coachman then, and commanded:

"Henri!"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Give me your strict attention. Step this way; stand there, so that your back will be toward M. Carter. Now look me in the eyes and reply shortly and concisely to the questions I shall ask you. Speak directly to the point, and be truthful."

"I am ready, monsieur."

"You said you would be glad to tell what you thought and also why you thought it. Was that the truth?"

"It was."

"When you stated that you believed that this gentleman assisted your mistress to disappear, did you state your honest belief?"

"I did."

"Now we come to your reasons for that belief. Let us first get directly to the time of the incident. You have naturally thought over the occurrences of that day, many times since then."

"Yes."

"Why, then, do you think that the countess left the carriage the moment she entered it?"

"Because I am convinced that she could not have left it after that time, without my becoming aware of the fact."

"Why?"

"I have already stated, because of the weakness of the springs and the readiness with which I, upon the box, could detect the slightest movement of a passenger within the carriage."

"You are positive, then, that with the door of the carriage closed—supposing the countess to be inside—it would have been utterly impossible for her to leave it without your knowledge."

"I know that she could not have done so."

"Then how is it that you are not sure that she seated herself upon the seat when she entered the vehicle?"

"I have asked myself that question, sir, and this is the answer. It is because at the very moment that madam entered the carriage, I had risen to my feet on

the box, in order to adjust the lap-robe which my livery compels me to use."

"So you were, in fact, exercising the springs to some extent yourself, at the time your mistress entered the carriage and was supposed to have taken her seat?"

"Exactly that. Otherwise I should have known positively whether she did take her seat in the carriage or not."

"But, having once adjusted herself, or having failed to do so, there was no way for you to determine, simply by the condition of the springs under you, whether she was there or not?"

"No. Only——"

"Well, only what?"

"I do think that if it had occurred to me that she was not there at the time, I might have realized it without looking inside."

"The possibility of her not being there did not occur to you."

"No."

"And all this, of course, convinces you that she did leave the carriage at the moment of entering it, and, in fact, while you were adjusting the robe about your legs."

"Yes."

"And one reason for your belief that this gentleman was cognizant of her act, is because he assisted her to leave the carriage, in fact, because he was there with her at the time, and it would, therefore, have been manifestly impossible for her to get down again, without his knowledge."

"Yes."

"But, are there other reasons why you hold such a belief?"

"There are, sir."

"I will have to ask you to tell me what these reasons are, Henri."

"Because I know that madam, the countess, and her husband, the count, were not happy together."

"You think it was her desire to escape from him?"

"I fear that she did so desire. I do not know."

"But think how easily she could have done so without returning as far as the station. Why, if such were her desire, should she have returned to Paris at all? Why should she not have remained in Havre? Or have taken ship from Havre to another port. Why, above all, if she had decided not to return to her husband, did she telegraph for you to meet her at the station?"

"There are a good many questions, sir, but they all tend to one answer. I have thought of all of them, many times, for on the face of it, her action, if she had decided to escape from the count, would seem absurd. But there is an answer."

"What is it?"

"Merely, sir, that she did not decide to disappear until after she had sent the telegram to me; in fact, not till after she had entered the train which was to bring her to Paris."

"Humph! Henri, I am not sure that you might not be a valuable acquisition to this office. Your answer is a good one. Did madam love her husband?"

"I ought not to reply to questions of that kind, sir."

"Answer every question that is asked of you, to the best of your ability, Henri," interrupted Nick Carter. "I believe that your convictions, whatever they may be, are honest ones, and this is a case in which we must deal with honesty. I think that M. Berthier and I are perfectly agreed that whatever occurs in this room, in connection with this matter, goes no farther."

"That is true, Henri," said the chief. "Answer the question."

"Madam, the countess, never loved her husband," replied Henri.

"Do you think she had given her heart to another?"

Henri drew himself to his full height, braced his shoulders, contracted his eyes, and his lips tightened over his teeth before he replied. Then, quite slowly, he said:

"I must request that I be permitted to reply to that question in my own way."

"Certainly, Henri. Answer it in your own manner; but answer it."

"I served, as I have already told you, in the family of madam's parents. I was familiar with many of the secrets of that family, and I enjoyed the confidence of madam's father to an extent which he never ac-

mitted to others, even to his equals. When madam, the countess, and her sister were babies, I played with them, carried them around on my shoulders—I loved them, perhaps even better than I might have loved daughters of my own. Madam was ever my favorite, and madam loved me, and confided in me, from her childhood and always, just as she might have loved and confided in a faithful dog which she knew would serve her till death, would die in her defense, and would remain utterly dumb when it came to the point of betraying her confidences."

"I understand you, Henri," said Nick. "Go on."

"It may seem strange that madam should select a servant for her confidant, but you must remember, gentlemen, both of you, that she has been in the habit of flying to me with her grievances, since she was strong enough to toddle across the lawn to exhibit a grass stain upon her frock, or to call my attention to the broken neck of a doll. When her parents were taken away, I watched over both children, and I believe they both loved me. When Mlle. Marie was married to Prince Ivan Stevanitan, of Russia, I remained with Yvonne, and I became more her confidant than ever. When she married Count de Tierney, I went with her to her new home, and she has continued to come to me with accounts of her pleasures and troubles, since then, just the same as she used to run across the lawn with the broken dolls to show to me. If you can understand and appreciate our relations, messieurs, I will continue."

"Ay, continue," said Nick. "If anybody can help us to find her, Henri, you are the man."

Henri turned slowly and faced the detective.

"If my love and faith in madam, the countess, were not so infinite, monsieur, I would, if I had a weapon in my possession, strike you dead where you are, for, as there is a God above me, I believe you to be responsible for her disappearance. If my heart has warped my judgment, and I wrong you, I will, some day, beg for your forgiveness."

CHAPTER V.

THE DETECTIVE SEARCHES FOR A CLEW.

"Continue with your statement, Henri," interrupted the chief, bluntly. "I have asked you if you believe the countess has given her heart to another than her husband, and you were replying to that question in your own way. Continue."

"I ask your pardon, sir. I have made this long statement in order that you may understand why I know whereof I speak."

"Well?"

"Madam, the countess, has given her heart's love to another, but she has done so because she still had that heart to give—because no other in the world has ever won it—and, as there is a God in heaven, she has given nothing else but her heart.

"I beg that you will listen to me to the end, sir. She was a little wild thing, always. She was never like other children. She was ever filled with what seemed to be mad impulses but which always in the end proved to be convictions as well as impulses. She is a Russian, and she has in her veins the best blood of all Russia; but she was reared in France, and as a French girl. She gave herself in marriage to Count de Tierney, without a thought—simply because she was directed to do so. I trembled then, for I, who had known her so well since she was born, knew that the day would come when her heart would speak—and I trembled for the consequences.

"But always, sir, believe me, the purity of her thoughts and impulses has been her chief characteristic. An impure thought, or an impure or selfish desire, has never entered her being. To that I can swear."

Again he turned and faced Nick Carter.

"She has run away with no man, not even with you, sir, to whom she has given her priceless heart. She has done nothing—she has committed no act upon which God and the angels cannot look down upon with smiling faces—she has committed no sin against herself, or against God; and those, sir, are the reasons why I would not kill you now, even if I had a weapon in my hand—because, however much I may blame you for

what had happened, my faith in her is as absolute as it is infinite."

"But, Henri," said Nick, smiling at him, "you are denying your own accusations."

"No, sir, I am not."

"What do you mean, then? How do you consider me responsible for her disappearance?"

"Because you have won her love."

"But—if that be true, which I must deny—am I responsible for that? Is it not rather her own fault?"

"M. Carter, the man does not live, who is madam's social equal, who could be thrown in her society as you have been, who would not adore her with a passion greater than he has ever known before. If you are an exception, then you are either blind, or you are a fool. I do not think you are either."

"I might thank you for that, Henri, if I did not understand how seriously you feel what you are saying. But you should remember that your own adoration of your mistress has blinded your judgment. But, suppose I do love your mistress; what then? Where is she? How have I prevailed upon her to disappear? How have I taken her away? I ask you these questions because I believe that your replies will perhaps put us on the right track of discovering where she is. Answer them."

"Ah! I cannot answer them. They are beyond me. She could not have gone away without your knowledge: therefore, you have helped her to go. She did not know where to go or how to remain hidden, and you have helped her to know. She has wished merely to escape the horror of returning to her husband—for it would be a horror to her after she has given her heart to another—and you have believed that later she would fly to your arms with the same alacrity she has employed in escaping from his. I believe that she is safe. I do not suppose that she has met with harm. I do not even think that you would harm her—at least, not now. I am only convinced that you know where she is."

Henri ceased speaking, and M. Berthier opened his lips to address him; but Nick held up his hand as a signal for the old man to interrupt.

"Let me take a turn now," he said. "I have something to say to Henri."

After that he waited fully two minutes with his eyes fixed upon the coachman. At last, with great quietness, he said:

"Henri, I helped your mistress to enter the carriage. I closed the door after she had entered. I saw her take her seat inside the carriage, in the middle of the cushions. I saw you drive away, and I stood watching your carriage until it passed from my sight. All that time I know for a positive fact that the Countess de Tierney was inside the carriage you were driving."

The coachman shook his head incredulously; but he made no reply.

"Now, Henri," continued Nick, "in everything you have said to-day, I believe you have been entirely truthful. I believe that you are honest in your conviction which couples me with this disappearance."

"You are right there, sir."

"But I also believe something more, which will surprise you, for I believe that you know when your mistress left her carriage, where she left it, why she left it, and how she left it."

The man started as if a bee had stung him. His face turned almost white, and he raised one hand in protest; but Nick stopped him before he could speak.

"Wait," he said. "I have not finished what I was saying. I was about to add, that I think you know all these facts unconsciously."

"Know them unconsciously! I do not understand you, monsieur. How could I know anything unconsciously? May I ask you to explain?"

"We know many things in our daily life which we know unconsciously. If, while we talk, you raise your eyes so that you can see out at the window, more than likely you will discover that some person is passing at the moment. And yet the passing of that person is an occurrence that is so common and so ordinary that you are aware of the fact merely by an act of unconscious cerebration. I mean by that, that you would not remember that you had seen a person passing the window, unless something should happen to compel you to rivet your mind upon that moment. If, for instance,

it should happen that a murder was committed at that very time, and you were asked to-morrow to say if you saw a man passing the window, you would then recall the fact that you had seen him, and at the same time there is little doubt that you would be able to describe him, although, until that moment you possessed merely an unconscious knowledge that he had passed it at all."

"If I understand you, sir, you mean to imply that if the surrounding circumstances were brought to my mind, I would remember when, where and how madam left the carriage."

"I mean exactly that, with this correction. She did not leave the carriage; she was taken from it. She did not step out of the carriage; she was lifted out of it."

"But now could you know that?"

"Because, according to your own statements, she could not have stepped out of it without the springs warning you of the act."

"True, sir; quite true."

"Now, you must remember that my knowledge of this event goes a little farther than your own. Whatever your opinions may be, your actual knowledge ends at the moment I opened the carriage door for the countess."

"It does."

"Mine continues until you had driven away and were at least fifty meters down the street. There we are both brought to a stop. Now, I want you to carry your recollection back again to that place and time. I want you to consider yourself again on the box of madam's carriage. I want you to concentrate every power of mind that you possess upon the incidents of that drive from the station to the home of the countess."

"I will try."

"Close your eyes. Try to see the station platform before you. Have you done that?"

"Yes."

"You are sitting on the box, peering into the faces of the newly-arrived passengers, in the expectation of discovering your mistress. Is that so?"

"Yes."

"Remember, you are back again at that time, and hence I speak in the present tense, which fact will, in a measure, assist your recollection. You are, then, looking at the faces, watching for madam's."

"Yes."

"Naturally you scan the faces of the women more than the men; but you have an idea that I will be there with madam, so you look at the men also. Is that true?"

"Yes."

"Does the scene return clearly, in your mind's eye?"

"Quite clearly. Very clearly, indeed."

"Good. Now, while you look for madam and for me, does there happen to be one or more among the faces which pass under your vision, that you recognize?"

"Yes; there are two. But I need not have taken this trouble to remember that. I have not forgotten seeing them. I will not forget it soon."

"Ah! Do those faces belong to men, or to women?"

"One is a man; the other is a woman."

"Are they in your own class, or are they——"

"They are each high born. But why——"

"Never mind why, Henri. Doubtless I am only trying to refresh your recollection. As a matter of fact, I am searching your unconscious knowledge of the events of that day. If my questions seem trivial, answer them without comment—that is if you are sincere in your desire to find your mistress. Now, return to the station platform."

"I am there, sir."

"Do other faces, which you recognize, pass before you?"

"Only one."

"Describe that one."

"It is the face of a man who once was in my employ. I should say—I—that is——"

"Never mind. You would say now that, although you have been a coachman for a great many years, you were not always a coachman. That is it, is it not?"

"Yes."

"Your language, your demeanor, your carriage and the look in your eyes when you referred to madam,

Countess, and her sister, told me that much. Henri Pink, now, we are beginning to understand each other better."

CHAPTER VI.

THE SECRETS OF UNCONSCIOUS KNOWLEDGE.

The coachman bowed his head for a moment. But his eyes remained closed, and he said nothing until the detective again addressed him.

"How many years have passed since this person, whom you recognized, was in your employ?"

"Twenty-five years, sir."

"What is his business, now? Perhaps you do not know; but if you do know, tell me."

"He is connected with this office."

"Ah! He is one of M. Berthier's men, then?"

"Yes. I have seen him since—in fact, I saw him but now, when I was brought to this room in reply to your summons."

"He is then what you would call a police spy."

"Yes."

"What was his business when he served you, many years ago?"

"His real business at that time was the same that it is now. He was a spy."

"I understand. He was a Russian spy, then, was he not?"

"Yes." Henri raised his eyes furtively, and M. Berthier grunted. Nick continued:

"Have you seen this man before that day, since the time when he was in your employ, years ago?"

"Frequently."

"Good. Has he recognized you as well as you him?"

"No. I am sure that he has not."

"What is his name?"

"Jean de Saranac."

Nick smiled broadly.

"I thought so," he said.

"Look here, Carter," said the chief, at this juncture. "I don't know what you are driving at, at all, but you are beginning to interest me, and you have brought out one point that I am glad of, at least. I will talk with Jean de Saranac later."

"If you will oblige me, chief, you will not talk with him at all for a while, at least."

"Well. Go ahead. This theory of unconscious knowledge interests me. I want to see what it leads to."

"Let us return to the station platform, Henri," said Nick.

"Yes, sir."

"Were those three faces all you saw there, which you recognized?"

"Yes."

"Let us return to the present tense. When Saranac passes out of sight——"

"He does not pass out of sight."

"Ah!"

"He remains on the spot where I first discovered him until I drive away."

"Indeed. And you watch him, I suppose."

"It is because I watch him so closely, that I do not know more about the actions of madam, the countess."

"Then she appears on the scene almost at the same time that you discover Saranac?"

"At the same moment—yes."

"Well? Recite all that happened then — when madam appeared."

"There was nothing, save that she came to the carriage. You came with her. You know the rest. I returned my gaze toward Saranac, for I was troubled lest he would recognize me."

"And why did you not wish him to recognize you?" demanded Berthier, breaking in.

"I think," said Nick, coolly, before Henri could reply, "that Henri felt that it would wound his pride to have a man who had once served him, recognize an old employer whose fortunes had so changed that he was compelled to become a coachman."

"Thank you, M. Carter," said Henri.

"Now, Henri," continued Nick, "was Saranac still there when you drove away?"

"Yes."

"What seemed to occupy his attention while he was there?"

"So help me God, sir, I believe he was watching my mistress. I did not think so at the time, but I would almost be willing to swear to it now, sir."

"Unconscious knowledge. Your mind was taken up with an idea that he was doing some other sort of watching at the time, eh? In short, you thought he might be watching you, did you not?"

"I did, sir."

"And now, because you are convinced that he was not watching you, you are ready to discover what he was really engaged in doing, and your judgment tells you that he was, in fact, watching madam, the countess?"

"I believe that to be the truth, sir."

"Unconscious knowledge again."

"When you drove away, was he still there?"

"He was."

"Now, try to remember if you saw him make any move which could be construed into a signal."

"No. I did not."

"Did he raise his hat? Stroke his mustache? Scratch his head, or——"

"He threw away a half-smoked cigar just as I tightened the reins to drive off."

"H'm! That was extravagant, wasn't it? Now, we have arrived at the point of driving away, but let us return for a moment. What became of the gentleman and lady of your acquaintance whom you saw at the station?"

"I did not say that they were acquaintances. I said that I knew them by sight."

"But they were acquaintances of the past, were they not? Of that past, before you became a coachman?"

"They were. Yes, sir."

"Did you know them intimately, then?"

"No. I merely knew them. They were a part of that life. It is more than twenty years now since that time. That life is all past. I have been a coachman for so many years that I do not now care to remember any other life. And, if I may be so bold as to ask, sir, what possible connection with the disappearance of my mistress could the presence upon the station platform of two or three persons whom I have known in the past be supposed to have?"

"I believe, Henri, that it has a great deal. Presently, when I have finished with the present line of questioning, I will tell you. Just now, let us stick to what we are at."

"Very well, sir."

"Do you happen to know where the lady and gentleman, whom you recognized, were standing, when you drove away from the station?"

"No. I do not."

"They had passed out of your view?"

"I did not look for them after I saw——"

"After you saw Saranac?"

"Yes. I did not look for them after that."

"During those old days of more than twenty years ago, were those people known to Saranac and was he known to them?"

"I have reason to think so; yes, sir; to both questions."

"Then, doubtless, if they saw one another that day, there must have been recognition between them."

"Probably."

"Now, Henri, are those people foreigners; or are they French?"

"They are French."

"Tell me their names."

"Chevalier and Madam Latrouville."

"Humph! You have already said that you know Saranac, who is employed by my friend, here, M. Berthier, to be a Russian spy."

"I know that he was once a Russian spy; I believe that he is one still."

"And these other two people—this lady and gentleman who are noble born—were they also, at that time, Russian spies?"

"Yes, sir, they were."

"Good, Henri! We are beginning to get at it."

"I do not understand, sir."

"You will, presently. Listen, Henri; you have said that you were deeply in the confidence of the father

of your mistress, the countess—in fact, that you were rather close, personally, to M. Skovanief."

"That is true, sir."

"Very well. Now pay attention to what I am saying. I am perfectly familiar with the history of Skovanief, the father of Yvonne de Tierney. She knows that I am familiar with it, and she has been told, herself, of her relationship to certain great men in Russia. I see the fact that I possess this knowledge, and that she does, also, affects you, but it need not. The man, Skovanief, is dead, and we need not rake up his history, but I want to tell you that the person who is responsible for the disappearance of Yvonne de Tierney, is a certain implacable enemy, and also a relative—of Skovanief."

"Good God, sir! Can this be true?"

"It is my belief. It has been my belief from the start. Do you see now where your so-called unconscious knowledge of the events of that day comes into play?"

"I do, sir. I understand it now."

"You were so possessed with the idea that the three persons whom you saw and recognized at the station, were on the lookout for you, that it never occurred to you that they were there to meet your mistress; that they were sent there by the old enemies of Skovanief to spirit her away, if possible, and you forgot those apparently trivial incidents. All your judgment was warped and distorted by your adoration of your mistress, and angered by the thought that she was unhappy in her own home, and that she had permitted herself to love another, who was not only unworthy, but who must also be a scoundrel, perforce. You never once thought that the day might come when Russia would reach out a tentacle to gather her into its maw. You have forgotten Russia, in your worship of that child, now grown to womanhood, who is so much more than a daughter to you that you have been content to serve as a coachman all these years, in order to be near to her."

Nick paused suddenly in his remarks, and wheeling, faced Berthier.

"Chief," he said, "I know you to be one of the most loyal and the best of men, notwithstanding your recent charges against me. I am about to betray a secret to you. Will you give me your word of honor that you will keep it forever a secret, as if you did not know it at all?"

"Why, yes, if you say so, Carter. What is it?"

"Then let me introduce to you the Grand Duke Peter, of the Russian empire, uncle to the czar, at one time M. Skovanief, now a coachman, but always the father of Yvonne, the Countess de Tierney."

CHAPTER VII.

THE SECRET OF THE ABDUCTION.

For a moment there was a genuine tableau in the office of the chief of the secret service bureau of the department of police of Paris.

He, whom we know as Henri, the coachman, hearing himself announced as he had not been called before, for almost half a century, although dazed, and seemingly paralyzed by the *dénouement*, still straightened himself with unconscious dignity, and turned his eyes from one to the other of his companions, with an expression that was half beseeching and half defiant.

Berthier plainly stared, not knowing whether to believe or not; but that he was convinced of the truth of Nick's statement, even against his own judgment, could not be denied, and for once the perfectly cool, collected, implacable, imperturbable, immovable, but withal kindly and thoroughly loyal head of the greatest and best of the secret service policemen in the world, was visibly surprised.

When he spoke, however—and by common consent, Nick and the father of Yvonne waited for him to do so—his voice was very calm and slow, and he addressed the personage whom Nick had so dramatically presented to him.

"Is that statement true, sir?" he asked.

"It is perfectly true, M. Berthier," replied the man. "I cannot tell you how the truth has come to the knowledge of this gentleman, whose forgiveness I will presently ask, for the wrong I have done to him in my

thoughts and suspicions; but it is, nevertheless, the truth."

He hesitated an instant, and Berthier opened his mouth to speak again, but the tall man before him raised one hand.

"I beg you, sir, to permit me to complete what I was about to say. His statement is perfectly true. I am a son of Alexander II., of Russia. Yvonne de Tierney is my daughter. I lived in France many years as one Skovanief. Years ago, with my wife, I was spirited to Russia, and from there sent to Siberia. But there were two loyal hearts in the world who came to our aid. They assumed our names and we were permitted to escape to America. There my wife died. I came on here. The interval of my separation from Yvonne, although it had seemed ages to me, had been but four years, but she was a baby when I went away; she could not remember me. I sought employment in the family where my children had been placed by their relatives in Russia. They were to be reared as French children."

He hesitated and ran his hand across his brow, wearily; then he continued:

"Perhaps you can understand that I had but one emotion left to me—one emotion, one idea—love for my two children. There had been another, a boy, but he had been spirited away before these girls were born, and I had no hope of finding him. All my heart went out to my girls. I pretended that I had served Skovanief, and so got employment where they were. From that day till now, I have been a coachman and a servant. From this day till I die, I shall remain one, and I wish each of you gentlemen to promise me that you will so consider me."

"But——" began Berthier.

"Pardon me, sir; it is my wish—my earnest wish. Under the name I first bore in this world, I am supposed to be dead, and a tomb, supposed to contain my body, is carved in my memory. Under my second name, that of Skovanief, I have disappeared and am supposed to be dead. It is better so. So let me lie in peace. I have risen again as Henri Boulger, coachman to the Countess de Tierney, and I would rather be her coachman than to be the Czar of Russia. She has no suspicion that I am other than I seem to be—her coachman, her servant—the big, human dog in whom she can place implicit trust. That is what I wish to be. That is all that I wish to be, and I beg of you both—of each of you—let me have my wish."

He paused and held out both hands toward them.

Nick took a step forward and grasped one of his hands.

Berthier rose from his chair and seized upon the other.

"Henri Boulger," said Nick, slowly, "you are the bravest man I have ever known. I am proud, indeed, to have known you."

"Henri Boulger," said Berthier, "you are living twenty thousand years ahead of your times. The heart, the hands and the fortune of Henri Berthier are always at your command from this day, for you have been the means of my knowing one man whom I can truly say is great."

It was a compact of strong men, by strong men, between strong men, and it passed, as if the dead grand duke of Russia, the father of Yvonne, had stepped into the room, made his bow, and retired.

Henri Boulger had returned to take his place.

But the situation had also changed, for neither Berthier nor Henri believed now that the detective had knowledge concerning the disappearance of Yvonne. Both were already convinced that her disappearance was due to the enemy who had pursued her from her birth.

"I have now a few words of explanation to offer," said Nick, when they had settled in their chairs. "You, Henri, of course, know of the death of—pardon me, but you see how I am ignoring the fact that you were her father—of the Princess Stevanikaia. Yvonne's sister. I was here in Paris about leaving the city when Yvonne sent word to me of the death of her sister. I started for Russia that night. She was on the same train, although I did not know that she was there. She had disguised herself as a guard, and in that guise she worked her way into Russia.

"During my work in Russia, I penetrated to the

private office of Prince Ivan, who was chief of the Third Section, and I learned all the dread secrets of that place, for many, many years. Among those secrets I discovered the history of the Grand Duke Peter, of Skovanief, and of Skovanief's daughters.

"I need not say that we were all in danger there. You will realize that, without any explanation from me. I will only say, that at last, accompanied by Charles Malet, his assistant, Boris, and Yvonne, I went to a meeting of the Imperial Council. We entered by a secret passage. We held the council in our power, and we compelled the czar to accompany us to Kronstadt in person.

"At that meeting of the Imperial Council, I let it be known who Yvonne really is. It was the first knowledge which the czar has had of the circumstances. He promised that if the secret were not betrayed, Yvonne should enjoy his protection and also a pension, as long as she lives. But I could see that the members of the council were not satisfied with this arrangement. There is always the chance that Yvonne, being a wife, might give birth to a son, and there is no surety that the secret of birth will be kept from that son. There is always a possibility that the descendants of Yvonne may live to claim the throne of Russia, if not in this generation or the next one, then in a subsequent one. Because of that possibility, the Princess Stevanislaus was in the way; she is now dead. Because of that possibility, Yvonne is in the way, and she has been stolen from us—for what, God only knows.

"Before I parted from her, I gave her every caution I could think of, for her protection, and yet she was abducted almost before my eyes.

"Chief, the man whom you sent to summon me here, Jean de Saranac, is a Russian spy. I could have told you that before our friend, Henri, informed us, for I have read his name among those papers of the Third Section to which I have referred."

"Well, I know it now, anyhow," muttered Berthier, grimly.

"Henri," continued Nick, "the gentlemen and lady whom you saw and recognized at the station, are the real abductors, and they were assisted in their work by Saranac."

"Yes. I believe now that it happened in that way."

"Now listen," continued Nick. "Mind, I do not know whereof I speak in what I am about to say, but I think my theory will prove to be almost the correct one.

"Those people at the station knew about the procession that was to pass that street and which would interfere obstruct your progress. Did you also know about it, Henri?"

"Yes; but there was no other way home that was better."

"They knew that, also, and they arranged their plans accordingly."

"But how?"

"This way: The coupé that was on your right at the time of the blockade—at the time you talked with the driver who did not seem to wish to talk—contained the man and the woman whom you saw on the station platform. Doubtless the coupé stood close beside you all the time you were there, but you were so engaged in watching Saranac that you did not notice it."

"That may be so."

"When you started away from the station, that coupé kept abreast of you. It clung to you and close beside you all the way to the point of blockade. You would have noticed the fact had you been less occupied with your driving."

"Doubtless."

"As soon as you pulled away from the station, Saranac leaped into a waiting vehicle of some sort, and followed as close behind you as he could manage. At the blockade, he managed to pull close up on your left hand."

"Well?"

"While you were standing there, he got down from his vehicle. He approached your carriage. There was a great deal of noise about there at the time, and the eyes of everybody were fixed upon the procession that was passing. Nobody had eyes to discover what was taking place in the midst of a throng of carriages."

"Ah! sir, that is true."

"It was an easy matter for Saranac to open the door of your carriage—for the other man to appear at the opposite door at the same time—for them to throw a robe over the countess' head, thus stifling her cries, and then to lift her bodily from her own carriage to the coupé on your right, and there to chloroform her at their leisure."

"By Heaven! Carter," exclaimed Berthier, "I believe you are right."

"So do I. I am almost sure of it. Saranac knew about those springs, and while they appeared at first to be in the way, they were really of assistance to him in the end."

"I see it all now. I see it all now," said Henri, slowly. "The unconscious knowledge to which you referred is returning to me again. You will remember that I told you of the restlessness of the horses?"

"Yes."

"I remember now that they started forward and then backward, very suddenly at one time, or they appeared to do so; but now that I recall the motion, I am certain that it was more backward than forward, and I also know now where the driver of the vehicle on my left disappeared to. He simply went to the heads of my horses, in order to start them back at the right instant, so that I would not feel the jarring of the springs when—when madam, the countess, was taken from the carriage."

CHAPTER VIII.

PLOTS WITHIN PLOTS—A CLEVER SCOUNDREL.

Nick Carter turned, with a smile, toward M. Berthier.

"Well, chief," he said, "if we were engaged in one of the old-fashioned children's games of my country, I should say that we are 'getting warm.'"

"Decidedly," said Berthier.

"What do you think now of the theory of unconscious knowledge?"

"I think it is logical as it is remarkable."

"Would you like me to tell you where the theory was first suggested to me?"

"I should, indeed."

"It happened in the State of Nevada, in America. A man who was supposed to be entirely lacking in education, in putting me on the track of some criminals whom I was pursuing, came to a sudden pause in the midst of his description, and remained for two or three minutes in an attitude of perplexity, scratching his head in the meantime until it seemed as if he would scalp himself if he were not interrupted. 'What is the matter?' I asked him. His reply was this:

" 'Well, sir, I was just glancin' back over the memorandum marks in my cranium. You know, a man's head is a good deal like a book, and if you want to remember things, and get 'em right, you've got to run back over the leaves. I call it looking up unconscious memory.'

"That, chief, suggested my theory of unconscious knowledge, and I have found, very often in my experience, that the party to an incident who believes himself to be the most ignorant, often unconsciously possesses the exact knowledge we want. As, for example, in this case."

"It is most interesting," commented Berthier.

"Now," said Nick, "we have arrived at the point of action. We are done with theory, and must get a move on us, for we are well assured on two facts, at least."

"What are they, sir?" asked Henri.

"Why, we know now who the instigators of the abduction of Yvonne are, and we know who planned and carried out the abduction."

"We know, in other words, the ultimate destination that is intended for the countess," remarked Berthier. "Siberia, or death."

"Not Siberia, but death," said Henri.

"The terms are synonymous," interjected Nick. "We must prevent either from becoming a fact. I think, Berthier, that it is a reasonable proposition that they would make no attempt to take her out of France immediately."

"I agree with you. They will prefer to wait till the first consternation of her disappearance has subsided. In fact, the theory advanced to me by Saranac himself,

when I supposed he knew nothing of the matter, is significant of their plans."

"How so?" asked Nick.

"Why, the scoundrel had the effrontery to suggest to me the very suspicion which I visited upon you: That you were responsible for her disappearance."

"Ah! I see."

"Their game is now to keep her well concealed until you have left Paris, and then, when by delicate suggestion, dropped in places where it will do the most good, they have created the fixed impression that the countess has run away with you, they will take her out of the country, or—they will quietly put her out of the way without taking her across the border of France."

"Right. And by the same reasoning, they will not visit bodily harm upon her until I have left Paris."

"I think not."

"Henri," said Nick, turning to the father of Yvonne, "have you any reason to suspect that any of these spies of Russia entertain any suspicion concerning your identity?"

"No. I have not. I am so changed, so altered, and they are so convinced of my death. No. Personally I regard myself as perfectly safe."

"In that case, Berthier," continued Nick, "I should suggest that Henri be dispatched at once to his apparent duties. That he return to the home of the countess, and that he conduct himself exactly as he would do if—well, if he had not visited this office at all."

"Yes, Henri," said the chief, "do that. I shall wish to interview the count again this evening, and I will go there to his house at that time. In the meantime, if anything should occur, use the telephone, and in asking for me, use the one word Berthier. To every question asked by the central office, or by any person in this office, reply only with that one word, my name. It is the only way of securing secret communication with me. When you have got me on the wire, you will say 'Berthier, Henri,' and I will reply, 'Boulger.' We will then know each other, and you will know that no person save myself can hear what you have to say to me."

"And," said Nick, "I shall make my headquarters here with M. Berthier, as long as I remain in Paris, so if you should want me over the 'phone, employ the same methods. And, Henri!"

"Well, sir?"

"I have another suggestion. How long will it occupy you to go from here to the home of the count and countess?"

"Not more than thirty minutes."

"I wish, as soon as you arrive, you would use the telephone and inform me if the count is at home. If he is there, M. Berthier and I will call together to see him, at once."

"The devil we will," said Berthier. "Why not send for him to come here?"

"If you will favor me so far, chief, I would like to go there, and I would like you to go with me."

"And why?"

"In the interest of the honor of the countess, chief."

"God bless you, sir," said Henri.

"By Jove! I had forgotten all about that aspect of the case," said Berthier. "Of course, I will go there with you."

When Henri had taken his departure, Nick was the first to speak.

"I believe in striking while the iron is good and hot, chief," he said.

"So do I. Where do you want to hit it, and how?"

"Send out for Saranac."

Berthier touched a push button and ordered that Saranac be sent in to him at once, but, after an absence of three or four minutes, the messenger returned with the information that Saranac was not in the office.

"He was excused for one hour, by M. Dumont, who

now in charge of the outer office. He should return within the next quarter-hour," was the report.

"Very well. Send him to me as soon as he returns," was Berthier's order. Then, as soon as they were alone, he added to Nick:

"It is not unusual for the men to run out in that way. I permit it when there is nothing of startling importance on hand, and I will confess that I did not regard the disappearance of the countess as anything more than an elopement, two hours ago. Now, it is likely to be a murder before we get through with it, if we do not make haste."

"Or two murders," said Nick.

"Two! What do you mean? Who else?"

"The count."

"The count? Why the count?"

"Wives sometimes make confidants of their husbands. It is possible, from the standpoint of certain people in Russia, that Count de Tierney is aware of the secrets which they desire buried so deep that no suspicion of their existence can ever be exhumed. I should say, therefore, on general principles, that his life is in danger from this moment on. I stirred up the hornets' nest while I was in Russia, by obtaining the secrets of the Third Section. No person who possesses those secrets is safe."

"I believe you are right. Hello! There is the telephone now."

Berthier took the receiver in his hand, while Nick turned and walked to the window. He paid no attention to the one-sided conversation that ensued, and was thinking deeply on the problems in hand, when Berthier replaced the receiver on the desk and called to him.

"It was Henri," said Berthier. "It seems strange to think of that man as a gentleman, and to remember that we have sworn to think and speak of him as such. A royal prince—but I won't even think of it. He says that the count is at home."

"In that case, let us go there at once."

"Wait, Carter. He says other things that are interesting."

"Indeed! What?"

"Well, he began by asking me if you were still here with me, and then, if you had left the room since he went away. I told him you had not, and then he said that when almost at his destination, he met on the street, face to face, an exact counterpart of yourself. He insists that the resemblance was so exact that he started forward and was on the point of speaking when the man, whom he really supposed to be you, looked at him without recognition—that it was his own idea that you did not wish to be recognized at that moment, and that, therefore, he passed on. But the resemblance was so strong that he was positive that it was yourself whom he met, until I informed him that you had not left my presence since his departure. Now what do you think of that?"

"Go ahead, Berthier. There is more."

"Yes, there is more."

"Well, let's have it."

"When he arrived at the house, he inquired of the house servants if the count were there. He was told that the count had been at home over two hours, and that he had received a caller in his private apartment. He occupies a wing of the house by himself, you know."

"Well?"

"When he entered the house he gave orders that he expected a caller—an American, by the name of Carter."

Nick uttered a low whistle.

"This is getting interesting," he said. "Go on."

"Well, the M. Carter made his appearance, was conducted to the private apartments of the count. He had been gone about fifteen minutes when Henri ar-

rived home. The count was, and is, still in his own rooms."

"Dead!" said Nick, shortly.

"What!" cried Berthier.

"It's as plain as a pikestaff," continued the detective. "Sit still, chief. We can accomplish nothing by hurrying. This man, Saranac, of yours, is a clever fellow; but in this case he is almost too clever. He has punctured his own tire."

"How do you mean, Nick?"

"I have said that he is clever. You probably know that. He tried his cleverness on me when you sent him to tell me to come here. Well, he, therefore, knew of the appointment with you. He also knew of your other appointments. He knows your habits, the principle one of which is to keep your appointment with everybody. He could not figure that the interview between you and me, to-day, would prove to be so interesting that you would forget, and, in fact, ignore your other engagements. He figured that, at the most, I would not be with you more than half an hour, and that, if we had not finished by that time, we would make an appointment for later in the day."

"But what does all this reasoning lead to?"

"This: Saranac has been exercising his genius by personating Nick Carter."

"Well?"

"As such he sent word to the count and made the appointment for which the count prepared, and concerning which he instructed his servants. The fellow had a good license to study me to-day, and he has made himself up to look like me as possible. He must have done a fairly good job, too, in order to fool Henri."

"That's so. Well?"

"As Nick Carter, he has taken especial pains to be seen and recognized. As Nick Carter, he applied at the home of the count, and put up the name of Nick Carter. As Nick Carter, he was received by the count. As Nick Carter, he has murdered the count. Hush, Berthier, I am as sure of it as if I had witnessed the deed. I feel almost prophetic when I say so."

"Well, go on, for God's sake."

"The deed accomplished, he has calmly walked out of the house—as Nick Carter. He has let himself be seen on the street so that his description will be recognized by many. No doubt, he has stepped into more than one café, for that very purpose. We know that he encountered Henri. Don't you see the devilish ingenuity of the fellow? The countess has disappeared. Even you were led to believe that I, Nick Carter, was responsible for that. What more reasonable, then, in the light of the circumstancial evidence he has created, than that I, Nick Carter, murdered the count?"

CHAPTER IX.

THE MURDER OF COUNT DE TIERNEY.

Nick had scarcely completed the sentence which outlined the crime against the count, when the office messenger announced that Saranac had returned and was in the outer office.

"Send him in here at once," commanded Berthier.

"And when he enters," said Nick, rapidly, as soon as the door closed, "please say nothing yourself until you get the cue I will give you. Let me do the first part of the talking."

"All right," assented Berthier. Then the door opened and Saranac entered the room.

Nick watched him narrowly as he crossed the threshold, and saw, or fancied he detected, an indication of surprise because the chief was not alone. Nevertheless, the man stepped jauntily into the room, nodded toward Nick and saluted his chief, military fashion.

"Mr. Carter wishes to talk to you," said Berthier.

hurriedly. Then he sank back in his chair, and for recreation, twisted his mustache energetically.

"M. Berthier and I have been talking about you, Saranac," began the detective.

"I have been greatly honored," replied the spy, in his softest tones.

"I have decided to ask him to detail you to assist me during the few days I shall remain in Paris.

"I will be most happy to serve monsieur," murmured Saranac, bowing.

"I am going to make a most unusual request of you, M. Saranac."

"If it is within my power, M. Carter, command me."

"Thank you. It is this: I have a reason for desiring to sink my own identity in another person, during a day or two. I have selected you to help me out."

"I do not think I understand."

"No? I will explain. I wish to transform myself into M. Jean de Saranac, and I wish to change Jean de Saranac into Nicholas Carter."

"But—pardon me—is such a thing possible?"

"Quite possible, as I shall demonstrate to you"—he turned toward the chief—"and also to you, M. Berthier, if you will do me the honor to accompany us."

"Where to?" inquired Berthier, lazily.

"To my rooms at the hotel. I have, there, everything necessary to the changes I shall make, and I have no doubt that I can teach Saranac, perhaps yourself, also, something new in the way of disguises. Shall we go at once?"

A few moments later they were in Nick's rooms at the hotel, and as soon as they arrived the detective began operations.

Many of the Nick Carter readers are familiar with the process employed by the detective in "making-up" to represent another person, or in making another person like himself. The process was very simple and easy for Nick Carter.

For a moment he studied the face of Saranac carefully, and then taking the necessary paraphernalia from his baggage, he worked rapidly and skillfully before the mirror until he had produced on his own face a strikingly perfect likeness of Saranac's; and when that was accomplished, and he felt satisfied with himself, he turned to Saranac, and remarked, genially:

"I should not have made this request of you, M. Saranac, if I had not discovered that your mustache, although perfect in its way, has not taken root in your face; as it is, you will not be compelled to sacrifice anything which you cannot replace in a moment. Will you remove it, or shall I?"

Saranac started guiltily, and flushed. The truth was that he had sacrificed his own mustache that day in order to duplicate the appearance of Nick Carter, and, afterward, he had replaced it with a false one so perfectly made that he had not supposed that anyone would notice the difference. It was the exact copy of the one he had shaved off.

"I will remove it," he said, rising. "I had occasion to part with it not long ago, and substituted this one. There. How is that?"

"All right. Why! Your lip appears as if you had only just parted with the mustache. But that is, of course, due to the fact that you have been compelled to fasten a false one there. So. Now, if you will take that seat, M. Saranac, I will soon make you look so much like Nick Carter that it would almost fool me, if I should happen to meet you on the street. So. Thank you."

The detective worked with great rapidity, so that within ten minutes he stepped back and regarded his effect carefully.

"What do you think of it, M. Berthier?" he asked of the chief.

"Perfect. Now what do you propose to do next?"

"I will change coats and waistcoats with Saranac,

So. Thank you again. Now, chief, we will stand here, side by side—so—what do you think of our appearance?"

"Why, simply that if I should meet you on the street together, I should mistake Saranac for Nick Carter, and Nick Carter for Saranac."

"Good! Then let us go."

"Where?"

"I wish to make a call. I want to try the effect of these disguises upon an acquaintance who, I believe, knows both of us by sight. After we have tried the effect upon him—— Well, after that, I will be prepared to risk it with anybody. But, Saranac, you will have to be on your guard, for I have learned this morning that he does not like me. He might, possibly, attack you, if the disguise deceives him."

"To whom do you refer?" asked Saranac.

"To Count de Tierney," said Nick, watching the man narrowly as he uttered the name.

But Saranac stood the test, if test there were, splendidly. He shrugged his shoulders and made no response, as if the whole subject were indifferent to him.

Berthier, however, smiled broadly.

"The very thing," he said. "He thinks you have run away with his wife; so look out for yourself, Saranac."

There was no conversation whatever in the carriage which conveyed the three from the hotel to the residence of the count, and in due time they arrived.

When they drove through the gate, Henri saw them and came forward, but Berthier intercepted him with a wave of his hand, and the remark:

"We shall not need your services, my good man;" and so they entered the house.

When informed, at the door, that the count had given orders that he was not to be disturbed, Berthier responded by telling who he was, and adding that he had an appointment with the count at that hour.

"He will go right up," he added. "You need not announce us."

The servant drew back, and Berthier, followed by Saranac and the detective, ascended the stairs.

After repeatedly knocking upon the door of the count's apartment and receiving no response, Berthier remarked, as if to himself:

"Can it be that he has forgotten his engagement with me, and gone out?"

"Suppose you try the door?" suggested Nick.

It opened easily.

Berthier entered first; Nick stepped back so that Saranac would come next, and himself brought up the rear; and thus, they passed into the room.

It was untenanted, but across it, at the opposite side, was a door which evidently opened into a sleeping room, and toward this door Berthier stepped, briskly.

"Perhaps he is in here," he said. Then he threw open the door and passed through.

Instantly, however, he stopped, and, holding up both hands in well-affected surprise, he cried out:

"My God, gentlemen, he is dead!"

Nick, who still held his place behind Saranac, watched that person narrowly, but he saw not a sign of emotion about him when the announcement was made. True, the man was doubtless prepared for it, since there was no doubt in the mind of the detective that it was he who had killed the count, but, nevertheless, he showed extraordinary nerve.

"Perhaps," thought the detective, "he believes that he can bluff it through yet. Perhaps he does not know that I was with Berthier all the while he was at work here. It may be that he thinks I had only arrived there for my second interview when he was summoned into the office."

The count was lying on his face in the middle of the room. A thin stream of blood had darkened the carpet around his head.

Berthier stepped quickly forward, and, stooping, turned the body so that it was face up, and then it was seen that there was a bullet hole exactly in the middle of his forehead. It was evident that he had been shot deliberately and that he had died instantly; also, that he had been dead some time, since *rigor mortis* was almost established. There was no weapon in sight, and thus it was also evident that suicide was not to be thought of.

Berthier straightened up and looked first at Nick and then at Saranac.

"I almost forgot which was which for a moment," he said. "Since you have changed identities, neither of you seem the same to me, which is not remarkable, eh? What I was about to say, Carter, is—— H'm! H'm!"

"Well?" asked Nick.

"Excuse me a moment, Carter. Saranac, step this way."

The chief drew Saranac to one side, and, while Nick waited, engaged in a low and earnest conversation with him, which lasted some time. Nick was smiling grimly, for he saw through the action of the chief instantly. Something must be done to make Saranac commit himself, and Berthier was adopting the most approved plan. When he turned there was a peculiar gleam in his eyes.

"M. Carter," he said, "I suppose you are aware of the fact that M. Saranac is one of my most efficient men. Well, we have discussed this matter at some length, and we have decided that you and he will return to my office together and await me there. I will make some inquiries here, and follow you in a few moments."

"Oh, very well," replied Nick.

"It seems," continued Berthier, "that Saranac came to this house himself, during the half hour he was absent from the office, and he discovered then that—shall I say it?—that you had been closeted with the count for a long time, and had only just left here. Saranac also suggests that you may possibly have had a reason in desiring to assume for a time his personality. He—well, in short, M. Carter, while I am very sorry, and while I have no doubt that you will be able to prove an alibi, you will consider yourself under arrest, and in the care of Saranac, until I follow you to the office. I shall spend a few moments in questioning the servants. After that I will follow you. I think I need not say that any effort to escape, on your part, will be not only a failure, but also foolish."

Then he waved his hand for them to go.

CHAPTER X.

WHEN FATE AND CHANCE TAKES A HAND IN THE GAME.

Fate sometimes plays strange freaks with occasion, and fate had determined to wind up affairs after its own manner, and all around, that day.

Fatality, too, played a strange part in the events that followed one another.

It will be remembered how plainly Nick had said that it was the determination of certain persons in Russia that everybody who held the secret of the so-called Skovanief family should pass forever out of existence. The countess had disappeared, and it was intended that she should never reappear. He had prophesied the death of the count in almost the exact manner of it happening.

But in making those prognostications, he had made no mention of danger to himself.

Nevertheless, he was as convinced that effort would be made to kill him, as he saw that the life of the count was in danger, and it was not without some small design in this direction that he had induced the man who he was certain was guilty of killing Count de Tierney, as well as of the abduction of the countess, to assume his personality. He had decided, merely, that Saranac should be arrested on the disguise he had worn when he killed the count. He had not, however, counted upon all that might happen as a result of Saranac's assuming that disguise, or all that was to happen.

That was where fate stepped in and took a hand in the game.

In playing the part that had been assigned to him by the parting words of Berthier, Nick had merely shrugged his shoulders, said that the charge was absurd, and had then followed Saranac from the room.

The carriage in which they had driven to the house of the count had been dismissed, and as there was no other in sight, Nick suggested that they walk, adding, as he did so:

"That is, if you are not afraid that I shall attempt to escape from you."

"You could not escape from Paris, even if you escaped from me," replied Saranac, "and so, if the charge against you is absurd, as you say it is, I should advise you not to make the effort. Yes, we will walk. There is a short cut through these streets."

"Shall we take it?"

"Yes. You will be spoken to probably many times while we pass along. You must remember that you will be mistaken for me."

"Ah! yes. That is so. I had forgotten it for the moment. I am you and you are me."

"The streets are dark and the section is a rough one. You see it has become quite dark since we entered the house of the count. Under ordinary circumstances, a stranger would not be safe through here after dark; but I am known here. Therefore, you, in my character, will be addressed several times, no doubt. Come."

"But why all these warnings?"

"Simply to inform you that if you should make an attempt to escape that you could not go thirty yards before I could have you stopped without difficulty. Come."

They strode along rapidly together, and were at least halfway to the office of Berthier, when late decided that it was time to act.

They were passing a narrow alley when suddenly, and entirely without warning, a man leaped out of the darkness, full upon Jean de Saranac. At the same instant something flashed in his upraised hand and then descended, and the man who looked like Nick Carter, who really appeared to be Nick Carter, but who was in reality Jean de Saranac, sank back upon the pavement with a sharp scream that was immediately followed by a groan.

Then, the dark object that had sprung from the alley and had wielded the knife turned and fled away through the darkness.

Turned and fled—but only for a short distance—only for half a dozen steps, for Nick Carter's right arm flew outward, something appeared in his grasp, there was a flash and a sharp report, and the man who had wielded the knife so skillfully pitched forward upon the pavement with a shattered leg.

There was a moment of silence after that.

Dwellers in that vicinity, who heard the shot and the cries, skurried into hiding places instead of running to the assistance of those who might be injured, so that when, after a short wait, three gendarmes made their appearance, there was only the cursing figure of the man with the broken leg, who was now also provided with handcuffs, and the wounded and unconscious form of Saranac with Nick bending over him, stanching the bleeding as best he could, to be found there; and Nick, they believed to be Saranac, an officer connected with the department of the secret service.

An ambulance—two ambulances—were summoned. Other police officers were called, and in a few moments after the double tragedy, if it might be so called, Saranac, under the name of Nick Carter, was being hurried to one hospital, his assassin was being taken to another, and the real Nick Carter, still as Jean de Saranac, was hastening back toward the residence where he had left Berthier; hurrying to intercept him, and they met at the entrance.

"Never mind, Berthier," he said. "A mightier hand than ours has taken a chance in this game. Chance, fate, what you will, has taken it all out of our care."

Then, in a few words, he related what had happened.

"Come," he said, in conclusion. "I think we may know all there is to know within a very short time. We will visit the man with the broken leg first, for from him I think we will obtain the key to the whole situation."

They were shortly beside the cot where the man had been laid, and Berthier, regarding him sternly, said slowly:

"You are an old offender, Biroteau. Do you feel like making a confession?"

"Confess nothing," replied the man, stolidly. "Saranac saw it all. He can testify against me. You won't need any confession."

"Nevertheless, if you will reply to my questions truthfully, I think I can save you from the guillotine. I can promise you a prison instead. How long had you been following the man you stabbed, and what was his name?"

"You know that, too. Nick Carter was his name. Is he dead?"

"We do not know. How long had you been following him?"

"Since noon. When he went to your office, when he came away from it with you and Saranac and went back to his hotel, when you came out of the hotel together and went to the Count de Tierney's, and when he came out of there with Saranac. When they turned through the Rue Margot, I knew it was my chance. I ran ahead, concealed myself, and took it."

"How much were you to be paid for the job?"

"A thousand francs."

"By whom?"

"I won't answer that question."

"Never mind," interjected Nick. "I will answer it for you. It was the Chevalier Latrouville."

"Well, since you know, why ask me?" demanded the man, surlily.

"That is enough," said Nick to Berthier. "It is all he can tell us. Now, please God, if Saranac is still alive, we will know the rest."

They hurried to the street again and leaped into their carriage, and while they were being driven with all speed to the hospital, where Saranac had been taken, Nick improved the opportunity to remove all traces of the disguise he wore, so that when they stood at the bedside of the wounded spy, he was again his own proper and handsome self. Saranac, too, had met with the same transformation.

The nurses in attendance upon him had been busy, and, save for the missing mustache, he was again Jean de Saranac.

More than that, he was conscious, and he tried to smile when he saw Berthier and Nick Carter standing beside him.

They drew nearer, one on either side of the cot, and with their ears close to his lips, listened to what he had to say.

"The doctors tell me that it is only a matter of hours after nothing on earth can save me," he said. "I am glad, chief, that you came to bid me good-by; but I don't deserve it from Carter."

"You wore the shape and features of Nick Carter once too often, didn't you?" asked Nick.

"Ah! You know about the other time, eh? I suspected that you did, when you took me to the dead count; but I was determined to see the thing through if I could, and you played it on me so well that I was not sure that I was not perfectly safe all the while. You got me knifed, Carter, by forcing me to change personalities with you. But, then, it never occurred to me that Latrouville would act so quickly. Curse him! I wish he had a knife hole in him, as well as me."

"Do you wish to confess to me that you shot the Count de Tierney?" asked Berthier.

"I might as well, for I did it, of course. I have nothing against Carter, only we—that is, Latrouville and I—were ordered to put him out of commission, as well as the count and his wife. Yes, I shot him. I was sorry to do it, too, but orders like that have to be obeyed. It was simply his life or mine. And now it is both."

"Where is the countess?" asked Nick.

For an instant the eyes of the dying man sparkled; then he said, slowly:

"I might as well tell you all there is to tell. I will get even with Latrouville in that way, and he is the only man on earth whom I hate."

"Yes: tell us," said Berthier.

"There is a secret room back of the wine cellar in the house of Chevalier Latrouville, in Auteuil. It is well fitted up and quite comfortable. The countess is there, and she is well cared for, I think. Latrouville's orders are to put her out of the way, but I don't think he would dare to contemplate doing that for some time to come. You will find her there."

"Tell me," said Berthier, "how you took her from her carriage, when you captured her."

"Oh, that was dead easy. Latrouville and his wife drove up on one side of her carriage, and I approached it on the other. We knew of the procession, and, therefore, of the blockade that would occur at a certain crossing. My driver left the box and went to the head of the horses that drew her carriage, and he succeeded by pushing them with force in such a manner

that the coachman had all he could do to manage them. While that was going on, I opened the door of her carriage and spoke to her. As she turned to reply to me, Latrouville opened the opposite door, and threw a blanket over her head. Then, through the blanket, I believe he choked her, although he denied doing that. We lifted her into his coupé; that is all. You know the rest. Is there anything more? I haven't much breath left."

"Only one thing," said Nick.

"What is that? If I can answer it, I will do so."

"Do you know the truth about the birth of the countess? Do you know who she really is?"

"Certainly. That is why she—and you, for you know about it—were condemned to death."

"Do you know what became of her father?"

Saranac hesitated; then, very slowly, he asked:

"Do you?"

"Yes," said Nick.

"Then keep it to yourself. When I am dead, you will be the only living person who does know it, save one other. He deserves to live if he is alive. Bend lower, Carter."

Nick complied, and Saranac added in a whisper:

"You may tell him that there never has been a moment when I have not known him, since his return, and that I have never told. Latrouville knows nothing. Russia believes him dead. Let him remain dead. Carter, Carter. Forgive me, will you?"

Nick pressed his hand silently and withdrew behind Berthier, who now bent down over the cot.

"Berthier," said Saranac, "I've lot's to answer for, but I've been a creature of circumstance, rather than evil, because I liked it. Even if I have served two masters in serving you, I have always tried to do my duty by you as well as I could. Will you have one more said for me after I am gone?"

"I will, and many of them, Saranac."

"Thank you, Berthier. Go, now. Leave me. I want to die, as I have lived, alone. Good-by."

* * * * * * *

Nick Carter, accompanied by M. Berthier, was seated in the parlor of the house where the Countess Latrouville lived. He was awaiting the coming of that personage, to whom a fictitious card had been delivered. The time was a half hour after Guy left the hotel of Count de Tierney.

Presently, Latrouville entered the room, and, as he did so, Nick leaped quickly forward, seized him by the arms, and snapped handcuffs upon him before he had a chance to resist.

"You are so slippery, chevalier," he said, "that we decided to hurry matters. We will ask you now to conduct us to your wine cellar, for we are anxious to meet your guest. No words, if you please. You are arrested for complicity in the murder of Count de Tierney, who was shot to-day, and for the actual hiring of an assassin who has stabbed your friend, Saranac, to death, by mistake. Mme. Latrouville will occupy a cell not far removed from your own, so you will not be lonely. Come."

* * * * * * *

One week later, accompanied by a maid and the ever-faithful Henri, whose relation she was never to suspect, the widowed Yvonne, Countess de Tierney, sailed from Havre for New York.

Nick Carter accompanied her to the steamer, and from the shore, waved a last farewell to her as the huge ship swung into the current. In parting, his last words to her were:

"You will be safer, far safer, in America, Yvonne. There you will be surrounded by friends, who will guard you. My present duties lie in another direction, for I must go to Japan; but, within a few months, I will see you again. Good-by."

Then he had crossed the steamer to the side of Coachman Henri, and, taking him by the hand, he whispered:

"God bless you, sir. You are neither a Russian nor a Frenchman; but you can become an American. You can watch over your daughter in security, over there; and some day, when the proper time comes, I think she should know that her father lives."

THE END.

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